



**WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE
ON NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE POLICY
Thursday, October 2, 2008**

Remarks by the Honorable Dirk Kempthorne, U. S. Secretary of the Interior

Thank you all, what a delight to be here. I appreciate the Mayor and his welcome to Reno. I was here about a month ago with the Mayor. He's invited me back next month because the Boise State Broncos will take on the Wolf Pack here. I arrived in Reno last night at midnight, quickly channel-surfed, there's the Boise State game so I was up until two a.m. May I just say what a delight to be here to look out and see all the friends. I mean, this is tremendous, Jim and Matt and Steve and Bob, John, all the good friends. I see a young marine here. John, God bless you. Thank you for your service.

Bob Modell and I went hunting one time in Idaho and I wanted to show him the hospitality of Idaho so I knew a ranch where they've always let me hunt, but I always asked permission. So, I arrived and went up and knocked on the door and asked the rancher, a friend of mine, I said "Do you mind if we hunt your property again this year?" and he said "Oh, Dirk, I love having you here. All the good things you do. You always respect the land. You take care of the land. Have a good day." And, as I was about to leave, he said "May I ask you a favor?" I said "What's that?" And, he said "You know my old horse and you know how much I love that horse, but it's got arthritis. It just came up lame. We need to put him down and I don't have the heart to. Would you do it for me? I'd consider it a real favor." I said "If that's your request, I'll certainly honor it." So, I head back to the car to get my weapon. I'm thinking "What do I tell, Bob?" And I thought 'Well, what the heck? Bob has a little sense of humor.' So, he said "How'd everything go?" I said "Bob, I'll tell you what. This boy had an attitude. He told us that we're not going to hunt his property and it really kind of ticks me off. I think I'll show him a lesson." I grabbed the rifle, went, shot his horse. Next thing I know there's two more shots that go off right beside me. It's Bob. He said "I got his cow and his pig." But, we had a good day and we're going to have a good day here.

I'm sincere when I say that it's good just to wake up this morning and realize that I get to spend the day with good friends. We share a love for the great outdoors. I trust that you consider the entire team at the Department of the Interior as your friends and your partners. They've been working hard for this conference along with CEQ and Agriculture, all the other wonderful groups. President Bush and Vice President Cheney and I wanted to set the bar high for the success of this particular conference. Today we meet as America is facing a crisis in our financial markets and some might ask "Is this the appropriate time to hold a national meeting on hunting and wildlife policy?" And, I would answer "Absolutely". While we're not facing an immediate crisis today, we're dealing with a growing crisis. Hanging in the balance is a future of hunting heritage and

with it the future of conservation in America, the health of our wildlife, the health of our land, our water, our forest, our wetlands, and ultimately I would argue, the health of our people; not just the physical health- that's certainly part of it- but, our emotional and our spiritual health so intimately linked to God's beautiful creation. It is the nature of Americans to come together in times of national crisis. The world is seeing that as we confront the current financial crisis the labels of Democrats and Republicans they melt away. We are Americans. We will sacrifice what is needed; make the hard decisions that are necessary and work together to weather the storm to ensure the betterment and the prosperity of our more perfect union. Today, we're coming together at this conference in the same way. We're leaving the labels at the door. We are Americans representing a wide variety of backgrounds and political persuasions. But, first and foremost, we are Americans and we are here to work together to build a better America, a more beautiful and healthy America for our children and our grandchildren to inherit.

This is not the first crisis that we've faced that threatens our wild places and wild creatures. A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt presided over a nation that was fast depleting and degrading these precious resources. Many of the forests of the eastern United States were stripped bare to meet the nation's hunger for wood. Wildlife populations were decimated by market hunting and loss of habitat. Unrestrained economic development and poor agricultural practices threatened our land and our water. Roosevelt brought together national leaders of every persuasion: governors and senators and congressmen; scientists, in the first White House Governor's Conference on conservation. Together, these leaders laid the foundation for a conservation movement in America the likes of which the world had never before seen. It was a movement that led to the creation of the world's greatest system of lands dedicated to wildlife conservation, the National Wildlife Refuge System. It was a movement that led to sportsmen footing the bill for fish and wildlife conservation through license fees, state and federal duck stamp, excise taxes on hunting and fishing and boating equipment. It was a movement that led to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which put to an end the wanton slaughter of our birds by market hunters and set the framework for managed harvest with seasons and with bag limits. It was a movement that led to the creation of conservation organizations such as the Boone and Crockett Club, Safari Club, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and many others that have conserved millions of acres of wildlife habitat and helped bring back abundant wildlife. It was a movement that led to the establishment of the North American Water Fowl Management Plan, a model of international cooperation that has restored and conserved millions of acres of wetland habitat across this entire continent. All of this and so much more began a hundred years ago when a great American president perceived a crisis facing our land and brought together our leaders to meet the challenge.

Roosevelt understood the need for America to continue to develop economically, but he also understood that the conservation of land and wildlife was as important to the welfare of the American people as rising industrial production and corporate profits. "The object of government", he said "is the welfare of the people. Conservation means development

as much as it does protection.” He went on to say “I recognize the right and duty of this generation to development and use the natural resources of our land. But, I do not recognize the right to waste them or to rob them by wasteful use the generations that come after us”. The century of conservation was born.

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to visit Theodore Roosevelt’s Elkhorn Ranch in North Dakota. I stood beside the foundations of his cabin and I drank in the surroundings. I also had the chance to read Roosevelt’s own description of the scene of what he saw a hundred years ago and how he reflected upon that; the cottonwoods that line the clearing and the river that ran past. Now, the river has changed course since then. I was surprised. It’s moved at least a quarter of a mile, moving further from the clearing. But, you know what? There are new cottonwoods along that new cut of river. But, it truly takes your breath away still today. And, just as that river has cut a new path, we too can cut a new path in conservation. Today, we stand on the threshold of a new century, a new challenge is before us, a new crisis to face. America’s leaders, you, meet again. Our charge isn’t just to celebrate the achievements of Roosevelt and Leopold and Pinchot and others. Rather, we are tasked with building upon the great foundation that they have given us to continue their work in an increasingly urbanized world. We have the horsepower to do it. In this room are some of the most accomplished people in the history of conservation and hunting heritage; you wonderful people that have assembled here today. In order to meet this challenge, sportsmen must again take the lead as they did a hundred years ago. We must continue to ensure as our predecessors did before us that our great tradition of hunting and fishing and other wildlife-dependent recreation remain strong.

As everyone in this room knows, there’s a lot of reason to be concerned that it might not. The number of hunters and anglers are down. People have trouble getting access to places to hunt. Parents aren’t taking their children hunting and fishing as they used to. The Internet, video games, and a hundred other activities compete for our young people’s time and attention. Children are shooting firearms, but it’s not from a duck blind. It’s electronically from the couch. And, often the hunted and the electronic games are human. This gets us to the importance of our hunting heritage. Hunting allows us to travel to places we never would have traveled, to meet people we never would have met, connect with nature in unique and intimate ways.

While technology improves, the fundamentals of hunting remain unchanged, which also allows us to connect with our past and those that came before us. In my gun collection, I made it a point to obtain a replica of a rifle that my Great-Grandfather, Charles Kempthorne, a private in the Third Wisconsin, carried to Antietam during the Civil War. It’s a Springfield Arms model 1849 69-caliber, rifle barrel musket. I remember a clear Idaho afternoon when I visited a friend’s ranch to hunt deer with that musket. Moving through a cornfield with husks brushing across the barrel of the long rifle, I was transported in my thoughts back to the battlefield at Antietam and the anxieties and bravery of a young infantryman. I wondered whether he felt brave or melancholy that morning as he walked through that cornfield. Was he reckless in courage or determined and contemplative? I never felt closer to my great-grandfather than on that afternoon. Even though the only shot that I fired that day was into a dirt mound when I cleared my

musket, I had a great day of hunting. Hunting is a solemn and often solitary conversation that a hunter has within one's self inspired by the chase amidst the natural environments. It is both personal and it is profound. I came closest to walking in the shoes of my great-grandfather on that Idaho afternoon chasing deer. And, while I didn't kill a deer, I never would have found that connection were it not for the fact that I'm a hunter.

All of you in the audience have similar to stories to share on why we care for hunting as an American tradition and why we're here today to preserve its future. President Bush, an avid hunter and angler, understands the importance of America's hunting and fishing traditions. That's why last year he signed Executive Order #13443 entitled 'Facilitation of Hunting and Hunting Heritage'. We're here today at the direction of this Executive Order. We're here to-among other things-develop a comprehensive, ten-year recreational hunting and wildlife conservation plan that will set forth an agenda for meeting the goal of supporting our nation's hunting heritage so that conservation in America will continue to be strong. The President's order also directs us to work closely with state wildlife agencies and sporting conservation counsel to establish both short-term and long-term goals. Over the past year, we've done exactly that. We've worked closely with a diverse cross-section of federal, state, local, tribal government officials, members of Congress and their staffs, sporting and conservation organizations in the private sector. We've engaged in an intense effort to identify 21st century conservation issues and develop white papers outlining innovative ideas for consideration at this conference for possible inclusion in this ten-year plan. We held a technical workshop in Denver we're heard from experts, scientists and land managers. We hosted a reception at the Department of the Interior to commemorate the anniversary of the White House Governor's Conference and Conservation and publicly initiate the policy development process that will culminate in these next two days. We held a policy workshop in Washington where we met with policy leaders from major organizations and congressional staff. We participated in more than fifty individual and group meetings with conservation groups, environmental organizations and congressional staff. And, late last month, we met with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus to get its members comments and ideas, a number of you were there for that meeting, as well.

We've done our homework. Now, we have arrived at the moment when together we must pass the test. We must take all the work that we have done and combine it with your great expertise, your long experience to chart the course for the future. Let me suggest this test has three parts. We must pass all three. The first is a battle of the heart. The second is a matter of government policy and the third is strengthening partnerships.

What is the battle of the heart? It is the battle of the hearts of our children. One of the fundamental truths of conservation is that if people learn as children to love the land and its wildlife, they will take care of it when they are older. Each of us in our own way has a passion for what is wild and free. It is a passion born at dawn as the early morning light peaks through the leaves to find a parent and a child in a duck blind. It is born at twilight when a canoe slices through the still waters of a mountain lake. It is born at night around a camp fire with crickets chirping and shooting stars streaking across an inky sky. We can come up with wonderful plans for the future of hunting and conservation in the next two

days. But, if we lose the battle of our children's hearts, if we don't find a way to light that fire of passion in them, then we will not succeed.

Many organizations are already taking the initiative. Ducks Unlimited has its Project Webfoot. The National Wild Turkey Federation has its Jake's Program. The National Shooting Sports Foundations has its Families Afield Program. I have a great appreciation for Catch A Dream, an organization that fulfills the dreams of young people with life-threatening illnesses to go hunting and fishing. Can you imagine if each of you went back to your state and helped an organization like that, what it would mean for those children? At the Department of Interior, we have our 'Get Outdoors, It's Yours' program. If you put all of these programs under an umbrella, you could simply call them No Child Left Inside, that's our goal: no child left inside. Do you remember when you were growing up how you felt when one of your parents said it was time to come in? Today's children don't want to go out.

Secondly, we must ensure that government policies promote hunting. The Executive Order directs federal agencies to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat. We've done this and we will continue to do this. For example, we've developed more mentoring programs to young people who come from non-hunting backgrounds. We've created more incentives for conservation on private lands. We've developed new policies and programs to protect wetlands and grasslands. We've worked to protect wildlife including increased access in protecting wildlife corridors while increasing energy security. We've made sure that when we collect and utilize data on climate change that hunters, game species, wildlife habitat are also taken into consideration. And, we've opened up more hunting programs on national wildlife refuges and other public lands. We've just posted to our website [Your Guide to Hunting at National Wildlife Refuges](#), the first comprehensive compilation of all hunting programs on the wildlife refuge system. It's part of our effort to invite families to return to the hunting activities that have connected their generations to nature and to cultivate new hunters to share in wildlife conservation and our hunting heritage. We've also increased the use of hunting as a wildlife management tool on national parklands where it's legal and, for the first time, authorized hunters to participate as qualified volunteers in culling operations in these parks. We've even established a hunting program on Apostle Island's National Lakeshore in Wisconsin, part of the national park's service. Many of the islands in the park are over-populated with deer herds. We've set up a hunting program to cull these herds and a telephone number where hunters can learn about it. This program is in jeopardy, ladies and gentlemen, because we're having trouble getting hunters to participate so please spread the word, give them a call. We need your help.

We do not know who will take office as President next January, but we've laid a foundation for the next administration to build on in support of our hunting, fishing, and other outdoor traditions. There are also a number of things that we can do right now that do not require a policy process, legislation, or board approval. We can contribute to organizations and programs that work to get kids outside. We can volunteer to help refuge and park managers run hunting programs. It doesn't have to be that much of a time

commitment. We can take a niece or a nephew to a hunter's safety course or on their first deer hunt this fall. We can take the time to explain why hunting drives conservation to a neighbor across the fence who thinks the term "sportsman conservationist" is an oxymoron, because, if we get one more child outside or create one more conservationist, then we are winning.

The final part of the test that we face is to strengthen our partnerships. This may seem like building a viewing tower on Mount Everest since no one in American history has done partnership like the sportsmen community, but the challenge before us is so great that we must re-double our commitment to work with each other to ensure the future of the traditions that underpin conservation in America. So, as we begin this conference, let's set before us some goals. Let us be committed to leave here with a real result, a ten-year plan, a road map to follow; let us be innovative. We can and we must find new ways not thought of before to support our hunting, fishing, and other outdoor traditions.

And, finally, let us continue to be passionate. Let us remember the call of the wild stirring in our hearts, the seeds planted in us as children that brought forth the love of nature and its myriad of creatures. We are now sowers of those same seeds; may we indeed sow them generously. I'm confident that together we'll pass the test. We'll create a legacy equal to one birthed a century ago by Theodore Roosevelt and the leaders of his day at that first White House conference. We will create a conservation ethic for this, our 21st Century. We're equal to the task. The power is in this room. The vision is in this room. The passion is in this room. Let's set about it and do it. God bless you.